



Press Release



**Congressman John Conyers, Jr.
Michigan, 14th District**

**Ranking Member, U.S. House Judiciary Committee
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus**

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Conyers To Address Voting Rights Challenges at PUSH

Representative John Conyers, Jr., (D-MI) House Judiciary Committee Ranking Member, issued the following statement at the 34th Annual Rainbow PUSH Coalition meeting:

“The advancement of voting rights is unquestionably one of the greatest challenges our country faces in the 21st century. The proper casting and counting of ballot is imperative to a true democracy, a government for the people and by the people. I am afraid that we are failing to live up to the ideals on which this country was founded.

The 2004 Election is the most recent example of how this nation has failed to ensure that all eligible voters are entitled to cast a ballot and have that ballot counted. In November 2004, this nation experienced the second presidential election where issues were raised concerning irregularities and improprieties. During the 2004 Election, this nation focused its attention on Ohio, where we learned that the mis-allocation of voting machines led to lines of ten hours or more and disenfranchised thousands of Ohio voters. It was also in Ohio, that this nation witnessed numerous incidents of voter intimidation that had a negative impact on voter turnout. While the focus was on Ohio, we learned of other voting irregularities and improprieties across the nation throughout the 2004 Election.

Most Americans and Members on both sides of the aisle have acknowledged that further reforms are needed to ensure that all of our citizen’s rights to vote are protected. On February 2, 2005, I joined Senator Christopher Dodd in introducing the Voting Opportunity and Technology Enhancement Rights or VOTER Act. This legislation will make voting more accessible for those of us who cannot spend a whole day waiting at the polls, will ensure that politics play no role in how elections are decided, and will protect the right to vote of those who are most in danger of losing it. Among other things, the VOTER Act will provide for a uniform Federal write-in absentee ballot, require states to provide for a verified audit trail, eliminate disparities in the allocation of voting machines and poll workers among a state’s precincts, mandate early voting, and prohibit voting machine companies from engaging in political activities.

Another legislative effort at the forefront of many Members’ agendas this session is the re-authorization of the Voting Rights Act. On August 6, 2007, Section 5, the pre-clearance provision, Sections 6-9, the federal monitor and observer provisions, and Section 203, the bilingual voting material provision, will expire unless Congress renews them. These special provisions allow for significant federal oversight of state and local voting functions for jurisdictions deemed to have the worst and most persistent histories of voting discrimination against minority populations.

As evidenced by the 2004 Election, we must ensure protections for our most vulnerable voters and act to re-authorize the Voting Rights Act as it provides such protections. Racial, ethnic, and language minorities remain the groups most susceptible to voter disenfranchisement. For example, Georgia’s new voter identification law, which has been characterized as the most restrictive voting barrier in the United States, must be “pre-cleared” by DOJ before it takes effect. If it was not for Section 5 of Voting Rights Act, this DOJ review would not occur. Now we hope that DOJ will do the sensible thing and object to this voter ID law.

With the advancement of VOTER, the re-authorization of the Voting Rights Act this session, and other election reform efforts, I pledge to do my part in Congress to address the

unlawful and unjust disenfranchisement of too many of this nation's citizens. My colleagues and I have been joined in this fight by several organizations, including many of those that are represented on this panel today, like the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, the AFL-CIO, and of course, Rainbow Push. I now ask for a commitment from all Americans to work with us in fighting for the legitimacy of our democracy. Unless we act, the next close election will prompt the same debates and public confidence in our democracy will suffer a potentially fatal blow."

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